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The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 68/11 and Security Council resolution 2210 (2015), in which I was requested to report every three months on developments in Afghanistan.

2. The report provides an update on the activities of the United Nations in Afghanistan, including significant humanitarian, development and human rights efforts, since the issuance of my previous report of 10 December 2015 (A/70/601-S/2015/942). It also provides a summary of key political and security developments and regional and international events related to Afghanistan. The annex contains an assessment of progress made towards benchmarks and indicators since the issuance of my report of 10 March 2015 (A/69/801-S/2015/151), in line with Security Council resolution 1868 (2009).

II. Relevant developments

3. Deteriorating security and an increasingly vocal political opposition placed increased pressure on the Government of Afghanistan during the reporting period, despite steps towards a possible peace process. The Government's peace efforts gained regional momentum though the Quadrilateral Coordination Group on the Afghan Peace and Reconciliation Process, but the commitment of the Taliban to a possible peace process remained uncertain. While recommendations for electoral reform were advanced by the Special Electoral Reform Commission, implementation stalled, even as the announcement of a date of 15 October 2016 for parliamentary and district council elections brought renewed demands for reforms.

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During the reporting period, the security situation was increasingly volatile as the conflict grew in intensity and scope, resulting in high casualties and displacement among Afghan civilians. The Afghan National Defence and Security Forces continued to face significant challenges in effectively countering the threats of insurgent groups across the country. The Government of Afghanistan took steps to further its economic reform agenda in the context of persistent slow economic growth and emigration, and began preparations for the ministerial-level development conference in Brussels.

A. Political developments

4. Since the issuance of my previous report, the Government of Afghanistan has undertaken efforts to reinvigorate the peace process. On 9 December 2015, Afghanistan agreed with China, Pakistan and the United States of America on a quadrilateral format for peace talks. The Quadrilateral Coordination Group on the Afghan Peace and Reconciliation Process met on 11 and 18 January and 6 and 23 February, twice in Islamabad and twice in Kabul. At the 6 February meeting, Coordination Group member States adopted a road map outlining steps towards a peace process. At the 23 February meeting, Coordination Group member States invited all Taliban and other groups to participate in the first round of direct peace talks with the Government, which were expected to take place by the first week of March 2016. Pakistan offered to host this round of talks. In addition, Afghanistan and Pakistan agreed to form a working group to foster cooperation between the ulema of the two countries with a view to ending violence. In the meantime, the Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs organized a "track II" dialogue in Doha on 23 and 24 January, with the participation of Afghan politicians in their personal capacities and representatives of the Taliban. The President of Afghanistan, Ashraf Ghani, has voiced his opposition to track II efforts that facilitate dialogue outside of the official process. The joint secretariat of the Afghan Peace and Reintegration Programme reported that in 2015 a total of 1,462 individuals had joined the Programme, compared with 1,716 in 2014.

5. Reports of rifts within the Taliban movement increased. In early December 2015, unconfirmed reports suggested that Mullah Mansoor had been injured or killed near Quetta, Pakistan, as a result of internal fighting. The Taliban denied his death and, on 5 December, released an audio recording of an individual claiming to be Mullah Mansoor. Meanwhile, clashes in the Shindand District of Herat Province between two local commanders affiliated with Mullah Mansoor and Mullah Mohammed Rasool Akhund, the leader of a faction opposing Mullah Mansoor's leadership, resulted in the reported killing of several dozen Taliban members.

6. During the reporting period, tensions within the Government continued to slow progress on key appointments, including with respect to positions essential to the delivery of the Government's reform agenda and to addressing challenges in such areas as security, the rule of law and governance. On 11 December, Massoud Andarabi was named acting Director of the National Directorate of Security, after his predecessor, Rahmatullah Nabil, had resigned, citing differences over President Ghani's outreach to Pakistan. On 21 February, the Government appointed Pir Sayed Gailani as the new Chairperson of the High Peace Council. On 24 February, the Government appointed Mohammad Farid Hamidi to the position of Attorney General and Taj Mohammad Jahid as Minister of the Interior. The positions of

Minister of Defence and Director of the National Directorate of Security continued to be held by persons serving in an acting capacity. The President's nominee for the remaining ninth vacancy in the High Council of the Supreme Court, Abdul Haseeb Ahadi, was confirmed by the lower house of the National Assembly on 28 December. In early January, the deputy provincial governors of Ghazni and Helmand provinces were dismissed, owing to their public criticism of the Government. On 9 February, President Ghani appointed a new governor of Kunduz Province. Two of the 34 governorships remained filled by persons serving in an acting capacity, and the number of female governors in the country was reduced from two to one after the Governor of Ghor Province had been appointed Deputy Governor of Kabul Province.

7. The political landscape grew more contentious with the formation of political opposition groups, a trend continuing since the previous reporting period. On 18 December, former presidential candidate Abdul Rasul Sayyaf announced the formation of the Afghanistan Protection and Stability Council, comprising mostly former mujahideen leaders and figures from the Government of former President Hamid Karzai. The group called for the swift implementation of the 21 September 2014 agreement on the establishment of a national unity Government, in particular the holding of parliamentary and district council elections and a constitutional loya jirga. On 14 January, former Minister of Finance Anwar ul-Haq Ahady launched the New National Front. Its membership included figures from Afghan Millat, one of Afghanistan's oldest political parties. The group called for an early presidential election, to be held simultaneously with parliamentary and district council elections, and questioned the constitutionality of certain posts established under the National Unity Government, including those of Chief Executive and Special Representative for Reforms and Good Governance, which the President had accorded vice-presidential status in October 2015. Despite differing platforms, most of the opposition groups interpreted the 21 September 2014 agreement as stipulating that the term of the National Unity Government expired after two years and must be replaced, either through early presidential elections or through a loya jirga that would reconsider the structure of the Government.

8. On 29 December, in the face of calls by political opposition groups and the National Assembly for decisions on the electoral calendar, President Ghani announced the Government's intent to hold the delayed parliamentary and district council elections in mid- or late 2016. On 18 January, the Independent Election Commission of Afghanistan announced an election date of 15 October 2016. The announcement was met with near-unanimous criticism on the part of political opposition and observer groups and the Office of the Chief Executive, whose spokesperson stated that the current Commission had "no legitimacy", that reforms were a precondition for the elections and that a new independent election commission should administer the elections.

9. Although steps were taken in recommending electoral reforms, implementation stalled. The Special Commission on Electoral Reform presented its final recommendations to the Government in late December, including proposals aimed at mitigating electoral fraud, reforming electoral bodies, improving the dispute resolution mechanism and voter registration, reducing costs and amending the 2004 Constitution, as well as two options for a different electoral system. The Government welcomed the recommendations, and the Special Commission concluded its mandate on 31 December 2015.

10. On 21 and 26 December, the lower house of the National Assembly rejected two decrees of President Ghani enacting a number of recommendations of the Special Commission on Electoral Reform, specifically on the election law and the law on structures, duties and authorities of the Independent Election Commission and the Independent Electoral Complaints Commission. The upper house of the Assembly also rejected the decree on the law on structures. As a result, the legal basis for the selection committee tasked with nominating a new independent election commission was called into question, and it suspended its work. On 10 February, the Cabinet approved new amendments to the law on structures, which are expected to allow the selection committee to resume its work. The United Nations continued to provide advice and technical assistance on electoral reforms.

11. On 8 January, President Ghani extended the term of the 34 appointed senators in the upper house of the National Assembly until after the next parliamentary election. On 18 January, the lower house of the Assembly approved the national budget for the 1395 (2016) fiscal year, after rejecting a previous version, citing a lack of new development projects, an imbalance in provincial allocations and the fact that no budget had been allocated for the envisaged parliamentary elections. The Assembly began its winter recess on 21 January and is scheduled to resume work on 5 March. The recess delayed the deliberations of the lower house on the President's proposed amendments to the law on acting ministers, which give the President authority to maintain the Minister of Defence, the Minister of the Interior and the Director of the National Directorate of Security in an acting capacity indefinitely.

B. Security

12. The security situation deteriorated further in 2015. The United Nations recorded 22,634 security incidents, representing a 3 per cent increase compared with 2014 and the second-highest number since 2001. Since the issuance of my previous report, fighting has intensified in Helmand and Baghlan provinces, and Kunduz Province has remained volatile.

13. Of the security incidents that occurred in 2015, 70 per cent were recorded in the southern, eastern and south-eastern regions. Ghazni, Helmand, Kandahar, Kunar and Nangarhar were the most volatile provinces, accounting for 49 per cent of all security incidents. Armed clashes and improvised explosive devices accounted for 79 per cent of all incidents, representing an increase of 3 per cent compared with 2014 and reflecting the overall higher level of insurgent activities during the year. Despite the Taliban's announcement of 24 April 2015 as the start of the spring offensive, there was no clear change in the incident pattern during the spring, unlike in previous years, or, for that matter, throughout 2015 as fighting continued unabated.

14. The Taliban expanded its territorial reach in 2015, temporarily capturing 24 district centres in the north (in Badakhshan, Baghlan, Faryab, Jawzjan, Kunduz, Sari Pul and Takhar provinces), in the west (in Badghis and Farah provinces), in the east (in Nuristan Province) and in the south (in Helmand and Kandahar provinces), in addition to temporarily seizing the provincial capital of Kunduz. This represents a significant increase compared with 2014, when the Taliban captured only three centres. Even though most district centres were quickly retaken by pro-government

forces, several remained under Taliban control for weeks, including in Faryab, Helmand, Kunduz, Sari Pul and Takhar provinces. Tensions associated with Mullah Mansoor's succession as the new Taliban leader after Mullah Omar's death did not slow the insurgency's anti-government initiatives.

15. Reports indicate a substantial increase in casualties among the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces in 2015, the first year in which the forces confronted anti-government elements with much-reduced international military assistance. Critical shortcomings continue to hamper the Forces in effectively addressing the threat posed by anti-government elements, including insufficient recruitment, high attrition rates and insufficient logistics and planning and air support and coordination. Insufficient recruitment and high attrition rates posed particular challenges to the sustainability of the Forces. In January 2016, the number of Afghan National Army troops reached 88 per cent and the number of Afghan National Police personnel 77 per cent of the levels projected for August 2016. At the current rate, recruitment cannot compensate for the losses generated by absenteeism and casualties, particularly within the Afghan National Army and the Afghan National Police.

16. During the reporting period, Taliban activities continued at a rapid pace, particularly in Helmand Province. In December 2015 and January 2016, the Taliban concentrated its efforts on attempting to seize strategically important parts of the Province, including the Garmsir, Khanashin, Marjah, Sangin and Washir districts, the control of which would facilitate access to opium-smuggling and weapon supply routes. Following reports of inadequate leadership, low morale and widespread desertion among the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces, the Government undertook efforts to rebuild Afghan National Army units in the area. In addition, a limited number of international military personnel were redeployed to Helmand Province to support the efforts of the Forces to prevent the Taliban from capturing the provincial capital, Lashkar Gah. In the second half of February, the Forces temporarily withdrew from the Musa Qala and Nawzad districts to reinforce security forces in other priority areas of Helmand Province. On 19 January, President Ghani appointed a member of the lower house of the National Assembly representing Helmand Province, Abdul Jabar Qahraman, as special representative charged with coordinating operations of the Forces in Helmand.

17. The Afghan National Defence and Security Forces also carried out clearance operations in Baghlan, Kunduz and Nangarhar provinces. Despite those operations, the security situation remained volatile in the north-eastern region, in particular the Kunduz area, where anti-government elements maintained their presence in close proximity to Kunduz city. On 16 February, a United Nations aircraft approaching Kunduz airfield came under fire and sustained minor damage. In late January, the Forces started military operations in the Dand-e-Ghori, Pul-i-Khumri and Baghlani Jadid districts of Baghlan Province, following allegations that the Taliban had violated a local ceasefire agreed upon between local elders and the Government on 7 September 2015. The United Nations continued to receive reports indicating the establishment of additional pro-government militia groups, particularly in the eastern region. Leading political figures in Kabul and at the local level increased pressure on the Government to endorse their proposals to raise and arm local militias in support of the Forces.

18. In addition to the conflict between government forces and anti-government elements, violence occurred between other armed groups on Afghan territory, including the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan Province (ISIL-KP). Composed primarily of former Taliban members, ISIL-KP remained limited in its presence to the Achin, Deh Bala and Chaparhar districts of Nangarhar Province. Recent operations by the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces, supported by international military air strikes, as well as attacks from the Taliban, led to the concentration of ISIL-KP in remote locations near the border with Pakistan.

19. Between 1 December 2015 and 15 February 2016, the United Nations recorded 4,014 security-related incidents across the country. This represents an 8.3 per cent decrease compared with the same period in 2014 and 2015, although it is noted that in 2015, January and February recorded the highest totals for those months since 2001. Consistent with previous trends, armed clashes accounted for the majority of security incidents, at 57.4 per cent, followed by improvised explosive devices, at 19.2 per cent. Targeted killings continued at a high level. From 1 December 2015 to 15 February 2016, 154 assassinations, including failed attempts, were recorded, representing a 27 per cent decrease compared with the same period in 2014 and 2015. During the reporting period, 20 suicide attacks were reported, compared with 30 in the same period in 2014 and 2015.

20. During the reporting period, 12 of the incidents recorded were either directly or indirectly against the United Nations. These included three cases of intimidation, one incident related to an improvised explosive device and eight criminal-related incidents, and affected mainly national staff members. On 3 February in Bihsud District, Nangarhar Province, an improvised explosive device detonated against a United Nations convoy, resulting in the injury of two Afghan national officers in the Diplomatic Protection Service.

C. Regional cooperation

21. Afghanistan and Pakistan sought to enhance their relations. On 9 December, President Ghani and the Prime Minister of Pakistan, Nawaz Sharif, jointly inaugurated the fifth Heart of Asia Ministerial Conference in Islamabad, which featured the high-level participation of countries in the region. In the Conference declaration, participant countries focused on countering security threats, promoting economic connectivity and strengthening confidence-building measures, urged the Taliban and armed opposition groups to enter into peace talks with the Government of Afghanistan and called for a collaborative regional security and counter-terrorism approach. India agreed to co-chair the 2016 conference. In Islamabad, Afghanistan and Pakistan committed to increasing cooperation in the areas of border security, intelligence-sharing and counter-terrorism. This was followed by the respective visits of the Chief of Army Staff of Pakistan, General Raheel Sharif, and the acting Director of the National Directorate of Security of Afghanistan, Masoud Andarabi, on 27 December and 5 February, to Kabul and Islamabad. They agreed to establish a military hotline and further discussed intelligence-sharing and counter-terrorism measures.

22. Afghanistan continued to engage with countries in the region. On 25 December, the Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi, visited Kabul, where he

and President Ghani jointly inaugurated a new building for the National Assembly and discussed the expansion of regional connectivity. Visiting India between 31 January and 4 February, the Chief Executive of Afghanistan, Abdullah Abdullah, also met with Prime Minister Modi. Between 4 and 6 January, Chief Executive Abdullah visited the Islamic Republic of Iran, meeting with Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and President Hassan Rouhani and travelling to the Port of Chabahar. In a joint declaration, Afghanistan and Iran (Islamic Republic of) committed to increasing connectivity, placing emphasis on the Khaf-Herat railway and a planned trilateral Afghanistan-India-Iran (Islamic Republic of) transit corridor. In the declaration, Tehran's support for an Afghan-led peace process was reiterated, as well as the need to accelerate progress on a bilateral cooperation agreement and to form a joint working group to study transboundary water issues on the Harirud River. On 3 February in Berlin, Afghanistan participated in the 17th meeting of the International Contact Group on Afghanistan, which focused on the security situation and the need to ensure the sustainability and viability of international support.

23. During the reporting period, Afghanistan and other countries in the region continued to state their commitment to trade, transport and energy connectivity. On 13 December, Turkmenistan hosted a ground-breaking ceremony for the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipeline project, attended by President Ghani. The President visited Azerbaijan on 22 December and Turkey on 23 and 24 December to participate in discussions on transport routes to link Afghanistan to Europe and bilateral economic cooperation. On 30 December in Pakistan, construction began on the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor's western route, which is to provide Afghanistan's Kandahar city with connectivity to the sea. The meeting of the Council of Heads of Government of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization held in Zhengzhou, China, on 14 and 15 December, which was attended by Chief Executive Abdullah, discussed increasing regional economic cooperation as well as counter-terrorism measures. At the meeting of the Council on Collective Security of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) held on 21 December in Moscow, member States adopted a declaration that cited the "growing terrorist threat" from Afghanistan. The Russian Federation underscored the need to enhance cooperation between CSTO and Afghanistan, echoing Afghanistan's calls for greater regional counter-terrorism cooperation. On 13 January, Tajikistan formally suspended consular services in Kunduz and Faizabad cities, citing security concerns.

III. Human rights

24. On 14 February 2016, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) published its annual report for 2015 on the protection of civilians in armed conflict in Afghanistan. The report documented 11,002 civilian casualties (3,545 deaths and 7,457 injured) between 1 January and 31 December 2015. This represents the highest number of civilian casualties recorded by UNAMA since 2009. The Mission attributed 62 per cent of the civilian casualties that had occurred in 2015 to anti-government elements and 17 per cent to pro-government Forces (14 per cent to the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces, 2 per cent to international military forces and 1 per cent to pro-government armed groups). It documented the United States military airstrike carried out on 3 October on a Médecins sans frontières hospital in Kunduz city, which had caused 85 casualties

(42 deaths and 43 injured), including 49 medical personnel. Seventeen per cent of all civilian casualties had resulted from cross-fire between anti-government elements and the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces that could not be attributed to a specific party. Four per cent of civilian casualties had resulted from unattributed explosive remnants of war. Ground engagements between pro-government forces and anti-government elements remained the leading cause of civilian casualties, accounting for 4,137 casualties (1,116 deaths and 3,021 injured), followed by improvised explosive devices, suicide attacks and targeted and deliberate killings.

25. A series of high-profile attacks, targeting mainly civilians, occurred during the period of December 2015 and January 2016. In an attack on 8 and 9 December at Kandahar airport, the Taliban intentionally targeted civilian areas, killing 38 civilians, including four children, and injuring a further 19. On 11 December, an attack in the vicinity of the Spanish Embassy in Kabul claimed the lives of three civilians and injured eight others. On 1 January, the Taliban conducted a complex attack on a restaurant in Kabul, killing 2 civilians and injuring 18 others, including five women and four children. On 3 January, anti-government elements carried out an attack on the Indian consulate in Mazar-e-Sharif city, Balkh Province, injuring three civilians. On 4 January, a Taliban suicide attacker detonated a truck full of explosives against an international military camp located near a residential area in Kabul. The attack killed 3 civilians and injured 38, including nine children, seven women and four United Nations staff members. On 13 January, ISIL-KP claimed responsibility for a complex attack against the Pakistani consulate in Jalalabad city, Nangarhar Province, which had killed 6 civilians and injured 10 others. On 17 January, a suicide bomber detonated explosives at a gathering of tribal elders in Jalalabad city, killing 13 civilians and injuring 14 others.

26. In January 2016, anti-government elements carried out two deliberate attacks on journalists and other employees of media organizations. On 20 January, a Taliban suicide bomber detonated a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device against a minibus transporting staff of the Tolo media organization, killing 8 civilians, including seven Tolo staff members, and injuring 24 others. The attack followed a specific threat issued by the Taliban in October against Tolo and other named Afghan news organizations, identifying them as military objectives. On 29 January, a journalist working for a national radio and television organization in Jalalabad city was killed by anti-government elements. On 31 January, President Ghani issued a decree affirming his commitment to freedom of expression of the media and instructing relevant agencies to investigate and publicly report on cases in which journalists have been subjected to intimidation or violence.

27. Children continued to suffer disproportionately as a result of the conflict, accounting for almost one third of all civilian casualties in Afghanistan during the reporting period. Between 1 November 2015 and 31 January 2016, the country task force on monitoring and reporting verified 264 incidents that had caused 562 child casualties (144 children killed and 418 injured). Ground engagements between the parties to the conflict caused the highest number of child casualties, accounting for 262, with explosive remnants of war causing 158 child casualties, the second-highest number. In one incident in Baghlan Province on 1 December, 6 children and one adult were killed and 11 children injured when an explosive remnant of war detonated. Complex and suicide attacks were the third-most-frequent cause of child casualties, resulting in 47, followed by exposure to improvised explosive devices,

which resulted in 31 child casualties. Reports of the recruitment of children by anti-government elements were received during the reporting period. In December 2015, the country task force on monitoring and reporting verified that anti-government elements in Badakshan Province had recruited 13 children to serve in their ranks, in two separate child recruitment incidents. This represents one third of all child recruitment cases verified in 2015.

28. The Government continued to implement its "road map towards compliance", aimed at expediting the implementation of the action plan to end and prevent the recruitment of children in the Afghan national security forces, signed with the United Nations in 2011. On 21 December, the government-led Inter-Ministerial Steering Committee on Children and Armed Conflict endorsed the national Age Assessment Guidelines to prevent and respond to child recruitment in the Afghan national security forces, an important step under the action plan. On 22 December and 8 February, the Ministry of the Interior opened its fifth and sixth child protection units in Mazar-e-Sharif and Jalalabad, respectively, the first four having been established in 2011. Visiting Afghanistan from 13 to 17 February, my Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict met with President Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah and advocated the expedited implementation of the 2011 action plan, as well as the protection of the civilian nature of schools and hospitals.

29. The Government finalized plans to implement, monitor and evaluate the national action plan for Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), with the aim of familiarizing implementing agencies at the provincial level with the plan by mid-June, one of its short-term commitments under the Self-Reliance through Mutual Accountability Framework. In 2015, the United Nations trained a total of 1,527 people (including 901 women), comprising students, local leaders, provincial officials and youth group members regarding the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and Security Council resolution 1325 (2000). On 16 January, a government task force on the Convention, supported by the United Nations, submitted its interim report to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs concerning steps taken since the issuance of the first periodic report, in July 2013.

30. The Government took steps to strengthen protection services for women. On 31 January, President Ghani launched an emergency fund for the medical treatment of women victims of violence, which had been developed by the Ministry of Women's Affairs. On 18 January, the Government reported that the State budget for the year 1395 (2016) included funding for six additional violence against women prosecution units, the establishment of which would bring to 26 the total number of such units throughout the country. Meanwhile, the United Nations continued to support service providers and policy dialogue aimed at ending violence and discrimination against women. On 9 December, the United Nations provided technical support for a conference on gender-responsive law reform held in Kabul. As at 31 December, 23 women's protection centres were operational in Afghanistan, down from 24 in 2014. At the centres, survivors of domestic violence are provided with protection, health care, legal aid, mediation and other services. Eleven of the centres are supported by the United Nations in nine provinces.

31. During the annual 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence Campaign, held from 25 November to 10 December, the United Nations supported outreach activities across the country in cooperation with national institutions and civil society. Events included radio programmes, workshops and quiz competitions

aimed at mobilizing village elders, students, government officials and religious leaders to address violence against women and girls.

32. Following the issuance on 2 September of the presidential legislative decree on preventive detention, whose provisions contradict the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Afghanistan is party, the United Nations continued to provide legal analysis regarding the decree and advocate its revision to include procedural protections required under the Constitution of Afghanistan and the country's obligations under international law to prevent the use of inappropriate information to justify arbitrary detention, allow ongoing appellate review and reduce the risk of the torture and ill treatment of detainees. The United Nations provided technical assistance to the Central Prison Directorate to ensure that prison and detention staff wardens and staff and medical wardens report injuries or physical signs found on prisoners that could reasonably be attributed to torture or inhumane treatment. The United Nations also supported the development of standard operating procedures to ensure that the relevant information can be brought to the attention of detection, investigation and monitoring agencies, in compliance with the national action plan against torture and the applicable criminal procedure provisions.

IV. Implementation of the Kabul process and the coordination of development assistance

33. Economic growth following the security, political and economic transition that occurred in 2014 remained slow. In January, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) announced that its growth projection for 2015 had been revised downward for a second time to 1.5 per cent and highlighted the need for immediate and transparent reforms to boost economic confidence. The Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey, released in December 2015 by the Central Statistics Organization, reported that poverty rates had increased from 36 per cent in 2011 and 2012 to 39.1 per cent in 2013 and 2014, further demonstrating the detrimental effects of the transition on Afghanistan's economy. However, steps to mitigate the economic downturn began with the initial implementation of the stimulus initiative, announced on 17 November by President Ghani. On 17 December in Nairobi, the Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization approved the accession of Afghanistan, subject to its ratification, by 30 June 2016.

34. Discussions continued between IMF and the Government of Afghanistan on progress achieved on the current staff-monitored programme, scheduled to end in February, and future options for engagement of the Fund. All quantitative targets of the programme are reported to be on track, including domestic revenue-collection targets, although targets were lowered to reflect revised growth projections and delays in the implementation of new revenue measures. Discussions between IMF and the Ministry of Finance continued on the 2016 revenue targets included in the 2016 budget. The Fund reported mixed progress on structural reform benchmarks, including continuing concerns about the fragility of the banking system, with significant fiscal risks.

35. On 18 January, the Government released a progress report on the commitments made in the annex to the Self-Reliance through Mutual Accountability Framework setting out short-term deliverables by 2016. Government and development partners

continued discussions on progress on priority reforms in preparation for the ministerial-level development conference scheduled to be held in Brussels on 4 and 5 October. Discussions also started on the linkages between the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) summit to be held in Warsaw on 8 and 9 July and the Brussels conference, with a focus on the fiscal impact of security sector spending and the maximization of its contribution to development outcomes. In January, the Government started to draft a new national development strategy, intended to supersede the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (2008-2013).

36. The Government continued its efforts to introduce the practice of community-oriented policing among the Afghan National Police. In December 2015, the Ministry of the Interior established 12 new community policing units in several provinces, bringing their overall number across the country to 20, with the first having been established in December 2013. On 28 December 2015, the Ministry approved a manual for police-community consultations, which was submitted to the Professional Development Board for integration into the curriculum of the National Police training centre.

37. The Government continued to strengthen links between central and subnational authorities to improve coordination between line ministries, on the one hand, and provincial and district authorities, on the other, to improve service delivery. President Ghani invited groups of provincial governors to attend special Cabinet sessions to discuss security, governance and development in their respective provinces. The third and fourth rounds of the meetings of provincial governors with the Cabinet and the National Security Council took place on 6 and 27 January, respectively. Meanwhile, the 2016 budget of the Independent Directorate of Local Governance increased by 20 per cent compared with 2015, to $39 million, primarily to support the logistical requirements of provincial authorities and for infrastructure projects. Progress in other key government initiatives, including the 100-day plans adopted by line ministries, remained limited during the year. Civil servants continued to face access challenges in the light of the deteriorating security situation in many districts of the country, which had a negative impact on service delivery.

38. During the reporting period, the High Office of Oversight and Anti-corruption completed the registration of the assets of all high-ranking State officials, in line with the provisions of the Constitution and the law on overseeing the implementation of the anti-administrative corruption strategy. The High Office also started the process of verifying the registered assets of 16 officials. The international members of the Independent Joint Anti-Corruption Monitoring and Evaluation Committee concluded a two-week visit to Afghanistan on 26 February, during which Committee members met with senior government officials, donor partners and civil society representatives to assess the implementation of anti-corruption measures. In January, Balkh, Herat and Kandahar provinces established anti-corruption working groups, comprising provincial government, provincial council and civil society representatives to support the vulnerability-to-corruption assessments and the Committee's recommendations aimed at addressing corruption throughout the country. On 16 February, President Ghani dismissed a legal adviser who allegedly had been involved in the facilitation of a real estate deal between the Ministry of Urban Development and an individual convicted of involvement in the Kabul Bank scandal.

39. The Government reported improvement in the area of revenue collection. On 18 January, it reported that there had been a savings of $132 million in procurement

contracts since the creation of the National Procurement Commission in February 2015. Reforms in the Afghanistan Customs Department included the introduction of a new human resources policy and the establishment of a law enforcement unit. In 2015, the United Nations supported the modernization of 15 Customs offices in Afghanistan and their cooperation with the Customs services of neighbouring countries. Those steps helped to increase Afghanistan's annual Customs revenue from $750 million in 2014 to $900 million in 2015.

40. A number of initiatives were undertaken to improve the transparency of recruitment and the long-term sustainability of the civil service. On 2 January, the National Assembly approved a presidential decree transferring the recruitment authority of senior-level civil servants from the Independent Administrative Reform and Civil Service Commission to the relevant ministries in order to decentralize and accelerate recruitment processes. The Commission maintains an oversight role to prevent violations of rules and procedures. On 4 January, the Cabinet approved a new unified salary scale harmonizing budgetary and extrabudgetary technical assistance. The Government also decided to simplify access to the budgetary "capacity-building for results" programme for all line ministries and independent entities to support more comprehensive reforms.

V. Humanitarian assistance

41. The humanitarian situation deteriorated in 2015 as a result of intensified conflict-induced displacements over a wider geographical area and an increasingly difficult operating environment for humanitarian actors. In 2015, the national task force on internally displaced persons, co-chaired by the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriations and the United Nations, recorded 335,000 persons displaced in Afghanistan as a result of conflict in 31 of the country's 34 provinces. One of the highest internal displacement figures recorded since 2002, it represents a 78 per cent increase compared with 2014 and brought the estimated number of displaced persons in Afghanistan to more than 1 million. Between October and December 2015, an estimated 73,400 individuals were newly displaced throughout the country, particularly in the southern and eastern regions. Similar trends have continued in 2016. The majority of displacements were attributed to insecurity.

42. The rate of return of Afghan refugees through the United Nations voluntary repatriation programme increased significantly in 2015, with 58,463 individuals repatriated during the year, primarily from Pakistan. This represents a quadruple increase compared with 2014, when returns were unusually low owing to uncertainties associated with the political and security transition. In addition, 119,279 undocumented Afghans, including 100,042 spontaneous returnees and 19,237 deportees, returned from Pakistan, representing a 436 per cent increase compared with 2014. In 2015, 143,154 undocumented Afghans, including a small number of refugee card holders, were deported from the Islamic Republic of Iran. There were 269,596 spontaneous returnees from the Islamic Republic of Iran as well, nearly all of them undocumented individuals. While host communities supported many returnees, obstacles in obtaining documentation and gaining access to services, together with other issues, adversely affected their reintegration prospects. A majority of returnees preferred to seek livelihood opportunities in urban centres, although they were unable to do so in conflict-affected districts. To help overcome the main reintegration challenges faced by returnees, the United Nations supported the

Government in formulating a comprehensive voluntary repatriation and reintegration strategy and establishing a reintegration working group.

43. In 2015, Afghanistan continued to host a significant number of refugees from Pakistan. An estimated 74 per cent of the total number — which is estimated to be 200,000 pending reverification — were registered in Khost Province, with the remaining refugees registered in Paktika Province. The majority of those refugees arrived in Afghanistan as a result of military operations in the North Waziristan Agency of Pakistan. Most are settled in host communities, having been facilitated in that process by tribal affinities. Humanitarian partners provided emergency assistance as well as longer-term protection, even though resource limitations constrained the response.

44. During the reporting period, the Government of Afghanistan and partners discussed measures to mitigate the flow of Afghans out of the country. In 2015, 213,000 Afghans arrived in Europe by sea, accounting for 21 per cent of the total number of arrivals and representing the second-largest population group, after Syrians. An estimated 13 per cent were unaccompanied minors or separated children, almost double the number registered in 2014. As of mid-February 2016, the percentage of Afghans arriving in Europe by way of the Mediterranean Sea increased to 26 per cent of overall new arrivals. In response to the increasing numbers of Afghans arriving in Europe, several European countries started to deport rejected Afghan asylum seekers. The Ministry of Refugees and Repatriations reported the registration of 686 voluntary and 256 forced returns from countries other than Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Pakistan at the airport in Kabul in 2015.

45. Mine action partners, coordinated by the United Nations, cleared 94 minefields and 11 battlefields in the fourth quarter of 2015, with the result that 31 communities in 10 districts were declared mine-free. At the end of the quarter, it was estimated that 4,305 minefields and battlefields remained in Afghanistan, affecting 1,615 communities across 260 districts. In response to the use of explosive weapons in northern and north-eastern Afghanistan in 2015, risk education and disposal teams were deployed to those regions.

46. Humanitarian access constraints continued to be recorded under the United Nations global monitoring frameworks. In total, 255 incidents against non-governmental organizations, the United Nations and other international organizations were registered in 2015, compared with 294 in 2014. Overall, 66 aid workers were killed and 91 injured, compared with 57 killed and 47 injured during the previous year. A total of 152 aid workers were abducted during the year. In 2015, Afghanistan reported 20 cases of polio, compared with 28 in 2014. However, security and access challenges remained a particular concern for the polio vaccination campaigns. In December 2015, 89,873 children could not be vaccinated; 13,493 children were not vaccinated in Helmand Province as a result of active fighting; and 72,288 were not vaccinated in districts of Kunar and Nangarhar provinces, where anti-government elements prevented access. Vaccination campaigns in Kandahar and Zabul provinces resumed following negotiations held in January 2016 with anti-government elements.

47. In 2015, the humanitarian strategic response plan was 70 per cent funded. Overall humanitarian funding reached $425 million in 2015, of which $292.2 million was designated for activities envisaged in the humanitarian strategic response plan and $66.6 million was designated for the International Red Cross and

Red Crescent Movement. A total of $5.8 million from the Central Emergency Response Fund was approved in mid-December to support humanitarian actors responding to needs related to the 26 October 2015 earthquake and the post-conflict environment in north-eastern Afghanistan, including trauma care, emergency food rations and emergency inputs to restore agriculture and livestock for more than 227,000 people. On 27 January, the Government and the United Nations launched the 2016 Humanitarian Response Plan appeal for $393 million, aimed at meeting the critical humanitarian needs of 3.5 million people.

VI. Counter-narcotics

48. On 9 December 2015, the Ministry of Counter-Narcotics, with technical support from the United Nations, released the *Afghanistan Drug Report 2015*, providing a comprehensive analysis of the drug situation in Afghanistan. The report highlighted substantial reductions in opium cultivation and production, alongside incremental increases in drug seizures from 119,960 kg in 2013 and 2014 to 128,079 kg in 2014 and 2015. Seizures of hashish increased by 81 per cent, while seizures of heroin, morphine and opium decreased by 32 per cent, 25 per cent and 14 per cent, respectively. The report noted that an estimated 1.9 million to 2.4 million adult Afghans used drugs, equivalent to 12.6 per cent of the adult population and more than double the global drug use rate. The report also highlighted the limited treatment capacity in Afghanistan, which has only 123 centres with the capacity to treat 10.7 per cent of opium and heroin users. The report concluded by recommending measures including improved coordination between national counter-narcotics agencies, sustained support for enforcement, eradication, seizure and arrest operations, and increased treatment capacity for drug users. To increase treatment capacity, in December 2015 the Ministry of Public Health, in coordination with the Ministry of Counter-Narcotics and with technical support from the United Nations, opened the country's first large drug treatment and rehabilitation centre, in Kabul.

49. Between 15 November 2015 and 9 February 2016, Afghan law enforcement authorities conducted 571 counter-narcotics operations, resulting in the seizure of approximately 194,607 kg of narcotics, which included 2,193 kg of heroin, 8,749 kg of opium, 1,977 kg of morphine, 15.7 kg of methamphetamine and 181,672 kg of hashish; the seizure of 27,719 kg of solid precursor chemicals and 1,327 litres of liquid precursor chemicals; and the arrest of 629 suspects and the confiscation of 127 vehicles, 78 weapons and 78 mobile telephones. Three members of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces were killed and nine wounded in the course of those operations.

50. On 14 December, the Government of Afghanistan and the United Nations co-chaired the high-level meeting of partners for Afghanistan and neighbouring countries in Vienna, at which the Minister of Counter-Narcotics presented the Afghan national drug action plan to counter the threat of illicit drugs. Meeting participants expressed readiness to support the action plan as well as the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime country programme for Afghanistan for the period 2016-2019, which was signed by the Minister of Counter-Narcotics and the Office on 16 December 2015.

VII. Mission support

51. On the basis of a security threat analysis, United Nations staff members who had been temporarily relocated from Faryab Province returned to their duty station on 7 December. UNAMA started the required work at the new office premises in Kunduz, following the destruction of the previous premises, to ensure full compliance with minimum operating security standards. The UNAMA office in Shebergan, Jowzjan Province, closed on 31 December as scheduled; its activities were absorbed by the office in Mazar-e-Sharif.

VIII. Observations

52. Afghanistan has completed the first year of the Transformation Decade. During this period of significant and complex challenges, the Government put forward a reform agenda, endeavoured to strengthen regional economic integration and sought to activate a peace process, while confronting an intensifying insurgency. Those efforts notwithstanding, the impact of simultaneous political, economic and security transitions has been slow to diminish. Persistently low rates of economic growth, high unemployment and rising levels of conflict-related displacement and civilian casualties have exacted a heavy cost on the population and fuelled an increasingly vocal political opposition. In 2016, there is an urgent need for the Government to sustain its unity of purpose and keep Afghanistan on the path towards stability, accountability and greater self-reliance. In this regard, I encourage the Government to move forward in making key outstanding appointments.

53. I welcome the agreement reached by Afghanistan with China, Pakistan and the United States on the establishment of the Quadrilateral Coordination Group on the Afghan Peace and Reconciliation Process. This has reinvigorated prospects for a peace process, whose realization is a fundamental component for durable political and economic progress in Afghanistan. In order to advance, this important endeavour must see the commencement of direct talks between the Government of Afghanistan and the Taliban. I welcome the endorsement by the Government of a road map for this purpose and call on Member States to contribute to the creation of an enabling environment for fruitful negotiation.

54. The effect of the conflict on the civilian population has continued to worsen. In 2015, the conflict left more than 3,500 civilians dead, including an unprecedented number of children, resulting in the highest number of civilian casualties — dead and injured — recorded since the United Nations began systematic documentation in 2009. I urge all parties to respect their obligations under international human rights law and international humanitarian law to prevent attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure, and to protect medical and humanitarian workers and facilities. Beyond public statements of concern, it is time for parties to the conflict to demonstrate that they are truly committed to minimizing civilian casualties. They must take demonstrable actions to that end. I commend the resolve and bravery of Afghan National Defence and Security Forces personnel in the face of rising attacks and welcome continued international support. Strengthening civilian casualty mitigation mechanisms and accountability must be a priority in the institutional development of Afghan security agencies.

55. I encourage the Government to consider revision of the legislative decree on preventive detention in accordance with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Afghanistan is party.

56. Absent a peace agreement, the coming months will likely see an intensification of the armed conflict. Reporting indicates an increasingly fragmented Taliban insurgency, which has increased the volatility of the security situation. I am especially concerned about statements by the Taliban identifying specific Afghan media outlets and their staffs as military targets, signifying a shift in the conflict to the information sphere. The murder of seven media professionals in Kabul by the Taliban on 20 January was a direct attack on freedom of expression, designed to have a chilling effect on the circulation of ideas, views and news. I urge all parties to the conflict to respect the right to freedom of expression and to protect journalists and media outlets. The capacity of the Government, humanitarian actors and communities to respond to crises continues to be affected by the conflict as well. I am troubled by the deliberate targeting of humanitarian workers and the increase in the numbers of those killed and injured in 2015. Constraints on humanitarian access disproportionally affect the most vulnerable members of society and render assistance more challenging.

57. Electoral issues, including parliamentary and district council elections, generated close attention during the reporting period. I am encouraged by the submission of recommendations by the Special Commission on Electoral Reform, which contributed to the advancement of discussions on this important topic. Broad agreement by the Government and political stakeholders will be important to ensure broad support for Afghanistan's democratization process.

58. The continued decline in the economic growth rate is a cause for serious concern. While it is encouraging that government measures to increase revenue mobilization have shown results, fiscal pressures are expected to continue. With the start of preparations for the NATO summit and the ministerial-level development conference in Brussels, to be held in July and October, respectively, it will be important that discussions reflect the fiscal impact of security sector spending on the Government's contribution to development outcomes. It is vital that Member States meet their commitments for financial and security assistance through the Transformation Decade, and with a view to enabling the implementation by the Government of Afghanistan of its reform programme. Absent sustained and predictable levels of donor support over the medium term, the corrosive effects of conflict, poverty and the illegal drug trade may gain greater momentum and have an impact on the broader region.

59. The support of countries in the region is crucial for economic growth in Afghanistan, as well as for addressing common issues of peace and security. The Islamabad Declaration adopted at the fifth Heart of Asia Ministerial Conference in Islamabad reflected the commitment to ensuring an environment of mutual trust and confidence in this regard and made a positive contribution to the advancement of regional relations. I am encouraged by the quality and tempo of bilateral engagement by Afghanistan with neighbouring countries and reference to concrete projects, among them pipelines, ports, road and rail links, and economic corridors. The countries of the region have much to gain from greater cooperation.

60. I am deeply concerned by the sharp increase in internal displacement figures in 2015, representing an increase of 78 per cent compared with 2014, as well as by

the increase in the number of undocumented individuals returning from Pakistan. Both issues underline the vital need to ensure sustainable solutions, including progress in implementing the national policy on internally displaced persons, as well as the comprehensive voluntary repatriation and reintegration strategy. An uncertain future, diminishing economic prospects and security-related fears persuaded more than 200,000 Afghans in 2015 to leave their country and seek asylum in Europe in pursuit of new opportunities. This issue must figure in the engagement between Afghanistan and countries to which its citizens are migrating.

61. Noting the continued importance of supporting political processes in Afghanistan and monitoring the security situation, I would request the Security Council to extend the mandate of UNAMA, set to expire on 17 March 2016, for a further 12 months. In so doing, I reiterate the commitment of the United Nations to a sustained partnership with Afghanistan, as set forth in the final report of the Tripartite Review Commission on the United Nations in Afghanistan, submitted to the Security Council in September 2015. I note the effective manner in which the existing mandate was utilized throughout 2015, in particular its good offices functions and engagement on critical human rights issues and donor coherence, as well as support for the strengthening of national institutions and capacities in priority areas as requested by the Government. I call upon Member States to continue to provide the support required in order to maintain our engagement and activities across the country.

62. I thank all the United Nations personnel in Afghanistan and my Special Representative, Nicholas Haysom, for their continued dedication, under challenging conditions, to fulfilling our commitments in support of the people of Afghanistan.

Annex

Progress achieved against benchmarks

I. Security

Benchmark: sustainable Afghan security institutions and processes capable of ensuring peace and stability and protecting the people of Afghanistan

Indicators of progress	*Metrics*
Increase in the number of national police and national army personnel mentored, trained and operational according to an agreed structure	• As of 15 November 2015, there were 162,694 personnel on the official Afghan National Army roster and 6,907 personnel on the Afghan Air Force roster, for a total of 169,601 personnel, a figure that is 32,306 below the end-state objective for January 2016. Also as of 15 November, there were 144,591 personnel serving on the official Afghan National Police roster, a figure that is 43,409 below the end-state objective. • Since 1 January 2015, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Resolute Support Mission has provided training, advice and assistance to the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces. • In December 2015, the Ministry of the Interior approved the manual for police-community consultations, which was submitted to the Professional Development Board for integration into the curriculum of the National Training Centre. A total of 82 women police councils were established throughout the country to mentor and support the educational and training needs of women police.

II. Peace, reintegration and reconciliation

Benchmark: national dialogue and regional engagement towards pursuing constructive and inclusive processes to foster a political environment conducive to peace

Indicators of progress	*Metrics*
Development and implementation of inclusive national and regional processes to enhance peace, reintegration and reconciliation efforts	• Since January 2015, a number of unofficial and official talks have been held to enhance peace and reconciliation. In February 2015, a delegation of Pakistan to Kabul, led by the Chief of Army Staff, informed Afghan leaders that the Taliban appeared willing to meet for peace negotiations. • On 2 and 3 May, representatives of the political office of the Taliban in Qatar participated in a "track two" meeting in Doha, organized by the Pugwash Conference on Science and World Affairs, an international non-governmental network. Members of Afghanistan's High Peace Council, former Afghan government officials and representatives of former parties of the mujahideen participated in their personal capacity in discussions on national dialogue and conflict resolution in Afghanistan. • On 7 and 8 July, representatives of the Government of Afghanistan and the Taliban met in Murree, Pakistan, for their first formal discussions. The meeting was hosted by the Government of Pakistan and was also attended by observers for the United States of America and China. The follow-up meeting in Murree, scheduled for 31 July, was cancelled after the announcement on 29 July of the death of the Taliban leader Mullah Omar. • On 8 and 9 December, on the margins of the fifth Heart of Asia Ministerial Conference held in Islamabad, the President of Afghanistan, Ashraf Ghani, participated in several meetings aimed at reviving the Afghan peace process. Heart of Asia partners affirmed their support for the resumption of the Afghan-owned and Afghan-led peace process. It was decided that a series of quadrilateral meetings would be held starting in January 2016 with representatives of the Governments of Afghanistan, China, Pakistan and the United States.
Increased ability by the Afghan authorities to gather and provide substantiated, updated and accurate information to the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011)	• In 2015, the Government continued to provide substantiated, updated and accurate information to the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011).

Indicators of progress	*Metrics*
	• On 27 March 2015, the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) approved the addition of one individual and two entities to the List of individuals and entities subject to the assets freeze, travel ban and arms embargo under paragraph 1 of Security Council resolution 2160 (2014). On 2 November 2015, the Committee approved the addition of one individual to the 1988 List, under paragraph 1 of Security Council resolution 2082 (2012).
Increased public support for the peace process through engagement at the community level and with civil society	• On 15 June, the Afghanistan Ulema Islamic Appeal Foundation together with the Kunduz independent ulema, held a gathering in support of peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan. About 400 independent ulema took part in the event. The event was supported by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA).
	• On 28 October, in Kabul, at a peace gathering on the future of peace talks in Afghanistan, the Acting Head of the High Peace Council, Abdul Hakim Mujahid, called upon the Government and the international community to resume peace talks with the armed opposition groups as soon as possible.

III. Governance and institution-building

Benchmark: extension of government authority throughout the country through the establishment of democratic, legitimate, accountable institutions, down to the local level, with the capacity to implement policies and to become increasingly capable of sustaining themselves

Indicators of progress	*Metrics*
Increased ability of the Afghan authorities and independent electoral institutions to manage and conduct genuine and periodic elections, with due regard to women's participation and constitutionally guaranteed quotas	• On 30 August and 21 December 2015, the Special Electoral Reform Commission, established on 16 July, presented the Government with two comprehensive packages of recommendations for reform following broad-based consultations. The Government welcomed the recommendations for reform which addressed fundamental issues related to enhancement of the sustainability, integrity, inclusiveness and transparency of the electoral process and institutions. The Commission formally completed its mandate on 31 December.

Indicators of progress	*Metrics*
	• On 6 September 2015, the Government approved all except three of the short-term recommendations of the Commission contained in the first set and issued two legislative decrees on amending the electoral legal framework to enable the incorporation of changes. The legislative decrees, submitted to the Parliament on 7 October, were rejected by the lower house in December and referred to the upper house.
	• The Commission recommendation that 25 per cent of seats in provincial and district councils be reserved for women was approved by Mr. Ghani on 6 September 2015, thereby reversing changes made in 2013 which had resulted in a reduction of the quotas to 20 per cent and zero, respectively.
	• Pursuant to short-term recommendations of the Commission, the process of creating new election commissions was initiated in December through the establishment of a selection committee responsible for nominating commissioners for appointment by the President.
	• From June 2015, the running cost of both electoral management bodies, the Independent Election Commission and the Independent Electoral Complaints Commission, has been covered under the national budgetary framework. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) continued providing technical support to the electoral institutions, including to the electoral reform process. UNDP supported training programmes for the Independent Election Commission on procurement, human resources and finance management.
	• On 29 December, the Government announced its readiness to hold delayed parliamentary and district council elections in the second half of 2016.
Establishment of the Independent Joint Anti-corruption Monitoring and Evaluation Committee and development of anti-corruption benchmarks	• The Government ensured a continuation of the oversight role of the Independent Joint Anti-corruption Monitoring and Evaluation Committee, including its monitoring of anti-corruption measures in government institutions. In June and August 2015, the Committee issued three vulnerability-to-corruption assessments covering the payment system for martyrs and persons disabled by conflict, investigation processes linked to the law on the elimination of violence against women, and the registration of official documents in the judicial system.

Indicators of progress	*Metrics*
	• On 17 September 2015, the Monitoring and Evaluation Committee released its eighth six-month comprehensive report. The report assessed the level of compliance with all 380 recommendations made since the establishment of the Committee in 2010, with a sample of more than 30 institutions. The assessment revealed that in 76 cases (20 per cent), recommendations were not taken into consideration at all; in 176 cases (46 per cent), recommendations were only partially implemented; and in 128 cases (42.66 per cent), recommendations were fully implemented. According to the Committee, the results clearly show the need for significant improvement in the Government's performance in respect of implementation of the Committee's recommendations.
	• On 21 October, the Monitoring and Evaluation Committee released a vulnerability-to-corruption-assessment of the national electronic identification card project, in which significant concerns were highlighted regarding practices related to recruitment of personnel and procurement. As requested by Mr. Ghani, the assessment was conducted in response to the concerns raised by members of the National Assembly and civil society.
	• On 8 November 2015, the Monitoring and Evaluation Committee released a review of selected foreign assistance programmes in Afghanistan. The report examined 14 projects, funded by five different donors and covering multiple sectors, including road construction, prison reform, health-care services and humanitarian assistance, with a view to providing examples of variations in aid effectiveness.
Empowerment of anti-corruption institutions to enable them to oversee a whole-of-government approach to anti-corruption	• UNAMA continued, with donor representatives, to facilitate the efforts of the Transparency and Accountability Working Group, through regular monthly meetings, as a means of supporting the Government in implementing anti-corruption measures.
	• In support of improved anti-corruption activities, the Government issued an administrative order to eliminate the duplication of functions among anti-corruption institutions, including the High Office of Oversight, the Supreme Audit Office and the Attorney General's Office, and to separate policy support functions from monitoring and oversight responsibilities, with the intention of setting up an independent anti-corruption commission with prosecutorial powers. However, as the Government was compelled to backtrack owing to technical issues, the investigative authority in corruption cases consequently now lies solely with the Attorney General. The post of Attorney General remains vacant.

Indicators of progress	*Metrics*
	• In 2015, the High Office of Oversight worked on the amendment of the National Anti-corruption Strategy in consultation with relevant stakeholders and in line with the Government's anti-corruption agenda.
	• The Government continued to pursue the development of extractive industries as an economic opportunity. In response to the Government's request of 8 February, the United Nations provided support in the areas of policy development, regulatory capacities and public consultations. At the meeting of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative held in Brazzaville in April, Afghanistan was granted an 18-month candidacy extension in respect of joining the Initiative.
	• From 1 to 5 June, the Government met with anti-corruption experts from two reviewing countries as regards conducting a mandatory review of Afghanistan's implementation of the United Nations Convention against Corruption.
	• The Government mainstreamed its anti-corruption efforts. Five revenue-based ministries (of finance, mines and petroleum, commerce and industries, transport and civil aviation, and communication and information technology) prepared anti-corruption plans. The plans were sent to the Ministry of Finance in late 2015 and are currently awaiting approval from the Office of the President. Upon approval of the plans, quarterly reports are expected once implementation starts. Other ministries are expected to present similar plans in the coming year.
Annual publication of the asset declarations of public officials	• In accordance with article 154 of the Afghan Constitution, on 20 June 2015, the Government distributed asset registration forms to the President and two Vice-Presidents, ministers, members of the Supreme Court and the Chief Executive of the Government and his two deputies. At the time of preparation of the present report, all senior officials, with the exception of one, had complied with the request and registered their assets with the High Office of Oversight. The verification of assets began in December. Owing to the mechanism's complexity, verification of the assets of the remaining officials will be launched in the future.

Indicators of progress	*Metrics*
Increased capacity of civil servants at the central, provincial and district levels to discharge functions and deliver services	• In 2015, a number of capacity-building training seminars on five common functions (management, computers, language, human resources and administration/finance) were conducted by the Civil Service Institute for the purpose of improving the quality of service delivery to the general public. Training was delivered to a total of 4,023 civil servants, of whom 1,118 were female. A total of 2,083 were trained at the central level and 1,940 at subnational levels. In addition, 702 senior and middle-level civil servants received training on local governance and public management in India, Malaysia, the Republic of Korea, Singapore and Thailand.
Increased transparency and effectiveness of civil service appointments	• The President issued an administrative decree in September 2015 which revoked the recruitment authority of the Independent Administrative Reform and Civil Service Commission. Instead, the decree authorized the ministries to conduct the recruitment process for senior civil servant positions. Since the issuance of the decree, recruitment has been carried out by the relevant ministries, while the Commission remains a monitor and observer during the recruitment process and, in case of violations, can raise an objection to or stop the entire process. • Efforts to ensure merit-based recruitment of civil servants at all levels continued in 2015. A further 58 district governors, 30 directors (grade 2) and 800 civil servants (grades 1-8) were appointed through that process. Appointments were made at all levels, including through the main office of the Independent Directorate of Local Governance in Kabul and its provincial and district offices.
Strengthened civil service reform supported by a comprehensive approach to capacity-building and donor-funded technical assistance	• On 28 June, the President's Special Representative on reforms and good governance, Ahmad Zia Massoud, presented his report on proposed administrative reforms and offered recommendations on promoting capacity-building in the areas of anti-corruption, political participation and the civil service. • In November 2015, the Independent Administrative Reform and Civil Service Commission pushed the Government to finalize the civil service law, which had been drafted two years ago and submitted to the Ministry of Justice for review. As there had been no progress since then, the President, on 16 December 2015, assigned to the second Vice-President the task of forming a committee to review the draft law and take necessary actions for its approval by the Cabinet and the Parliament. The committee is now reviewing the law.

Indicators of progress	*Metrics*
	• The Ministry of Finance developed the new operational manual of the Capacity-building for results project which was finalized in December 2015. The purpose of the development of the new manual is to re-energize the capacity-building of donor-funded technical assistance and strengthen the civil service reform agenda of the Government.
Implementation of the subnational governance policy and development of subnational regulatory, financing and budgetary frameworks	• During the reporting period, several meetings of the Ministries of Justice and Urban Development and the Kabul municipality were held regarding the municipal law. All concerned institutions agreed on the division of labour, roles and responsibilities. The law has been referred back to the Cabinet for further processing.
	• On 4 March, Mr. Ghani issued a decree restoring the oversight powers of provincial councils over local government departments. Through that action, a strike was ended by provincial councils, which had commenced after the lower house of the National Assembly voted to remove those oversight powers on 28 January.
	• On 5 October 2015, the Cabinet approved the long-awaited provincial budgeting policy. The policy is intended to ensure a transparent, predictable and equitable provincial budgeting process which allows for the consultation of provincial entities during the national planning and budgeting process.
	• In November 2015, the Independent Directorate of Local Governance submitted to the National Assembly its amendments to the Local Administration Law.
	• The subnational governance policy, adopted by the Government in 2010, was reviewed by the new Government in December 2015. The draft revised policy was then submitted to the President and the Chief Executive for their review and approval.
Development and publication of criteria for administrative boundaries	• National and international institutions continue to use the 2009 internal boundary data set, as stipulated by the Independent Directorate of Local Governance and the Geodesy and Cartography Head Office.
Establishment of adequate infrastructure for functioning government institutions, especially at the subnational level	• Teleconferencing systems were installed at the Independent Directorate of Local Governance headquarters and in 12 offices of provincial governors. The Directorate plans to equip the remaining provinces.

Indicators of progress	*Metrics*
Establishment of credible and accessible judicial and penal systems which respect and uphold the human rights of all citizens	• The Criminal Law Working Group, chaired by the Ministry of Justice, continued its regular weekly meetings whose purpose is to review substantive provisions of the Penal Code so as to improve clarity and incorporate prevailing standards of international justice and human rights into Afghanistan's substantive criminal law. • The Criminal Procedure Code Working Group, chaired by the Ministry of Justice, continued its regular weekly meetings with a view to completing commentary and guidance notes in support of the implementation of the rules of criminal procedure and practice. • During 2015, the Care and Control Department of the Supreme Court completed investigations related to 61 corruption cases of attempted bribery or forgery of judicial documents, which involved six judges, 11 judicial staff and 44 employees of other institutions. All 61 individuals were arrested and referred to the Attorney General's Office for prosecution. • The number of lawyers registered with the Afghanistan Independent Bar Association increased from 2,167 in 2014 to 2,645 in 2015. • The UNAMA report on prison health services completed in January 2016 established that some progress has been made in the implementation of the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules) as regards delivery of health services to prisoners in a manner comparable with health services delivery available to the community at large but that additional efforts are required to fully implement the standards, particularly as regards female prisoners. • In December 2015, the Minister of Justice requested a comprehensive assessment of existing juvenile rehabilitation centres to ensure compliance with minimum rules of treatment and to provide a basis for future reform.

IV. Human rights

Benchmark: improved respect for human rights of Afghans, in line with the Afghan Constitution and international law, with particular emphasis on the protection of civilians, the situation of women and girls, freedom of expression and accountability based on the rule of law

Indicators of progress	*Metrics*
Reduction in the number of incidents of unlawful use of force and intimidation of civilians, through compliance of relevant actors with international law	• In 2015, UNAMA documented 11,002 civilian casualties, (3,545 deaths and 7,457 injured), representing a 4 per cent increase in total civilian casualties compared with 2014. Some 62 per cent of civilian casualties were attributed to anti-government elements, 17 per cent to pro-government forces (Afghan National Security Forces (14 per cent), international military forces (2 per cent) and pro-government armed groups (1 per cent)) and 17 per cent to unattributed crossfire between pro-government forces and anti-government elements. Unattributed explosive remnants of war were responsible for the remaining 4 per cent of casualties, with children, by far, accounting for the largest number of victims. Ground engagements between anti-government elements and pro-government forces remained the leading cause of civilian casualties, accounting for 4,137 civilian casualties (1,116 deaths and 3,021 injured), followed by improvised explosive devices, accounting for 2,368 civilian casualties (713 deaths and 1,655 injured). • In 2015, the United Nations-led Country Task Force on Monitoring and Reporting on Children and Armed Conflict documented 2,829 child casualties (733 killed and 2,096 injured), representing a 14 per cent increase compared with 2014. • The Government continued the tracking of civilian casualties through the civilian casualties tracking cell in the Tawheed (the former Presidential Information Coordination Centre) and began to develop a national civilian casualty prevention and mitigation policy. • In December 2015, the Interministerial Steering Committee for the Protection of the Rights of Children endorsed the national age assessment guidelines. The guidelines reflect one dimension of the Government's obligations to implement the action plan and road map to compliance. Adoption of these guidelines represents an important step towards delisting the Afghan National Police, including the Afghan Local Police, from the annexes of the Secretary-General's report on children and armed conflict.

Indicators of progress	*Metrics*
Improved awareness by Afghans of their rights and by the Government of its obligations	• Under its National Plan on the Elimination of Torture, the Government committed to ratifying the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and to establishing the national preventive mechanism on torture, as required under the Optional Protocol to the Convention. The Government also committed to withdrawing its declaration, pursuant to article 28 of the Convention against Torture, that it does not recognize the authority of the Committee against Torture to conduct visits to Afghan detention facilities and receive complaints from detainees. The Government has neither ratified the Optional Protocol nor withdrawn its declaration under article 28 of the Convention. • In February, UNAMA issues its third public report on the treatment of persons whose detention is related to conflict, which contained a set of recommendations. The Government welcomed the report, endorsed the recommendations therein and issued them in the form of a National Plan on the Elimination of Torture later in February. The National Plan includes a number of legislative, preventive, educational and capacity-building measures designed to promote accountability and to ensure more effective implementation of Afghanistan's obligations to eliminate torture under international and domestic law. However, the National Plan still lacked benchmarks and timelines at the time of the preparation of the present report. • On 15 October, following the attack on and subsequent control of Kunduz by the Taliban from 28 September to 13 October, the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission issued a 20-page report on the violations of human rights, international humanitarian law and domestic law that had occurred in Kunduz during that period. The Commission also called for further investigations of the violations committed by all parties. The Taliban rejected the findings.

Indicators of progress	*Metrics*
	• A total of 1,527 persons (of whom 901 were female), comprising university students, local leaders, members of provincial councils and provincial peace councils and civil society youth groups, participated in training sessions offered by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), which utilized the training manual issued by UN-Women on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and Security Council resolution 1325 (2000). The 16 training sessions, which covered the concepts considered in the Convention and Council resolution 1325 (2000) and in other Council resolutions, including resolutions 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009), 1889 (2009), and 1960 (2010), were held throughout 2015, in the provinces of Baghlan (5-10 December), Balkh (24 January-2 February), Daikundi (10-15 October), Ghor (14-16 and 21-23 October), Kabul (10-19 January), Kandahar (10-18 January), Kunduz (31 December 2014-13 January 2015), Samangan (13-22 January) and Takhar (5-10 December).
	• Provincial authorities, civil society representatives and academic institutions joined the United Nations "HeForShe" campaign launched by UN-Women in six provinces (Balkh, Bamyan, Herat, Kabul, Kandahar and Nangarhar) and five academic institutions (Kabul, Gawharshad, Dunya, American University and Marefat High School).
Improved impact of, and support for, legal and policy measures to combat violence against women and girls	• The technical support and advocacy provided by UNAMA and actors enabled the Self-reliance through Mutual Accountability Framework, adopted in September 2015, to include solid short- and long-term deliverables and indicators on women's rights.
	• UNAMA continued to work closely with the Ministry of the Interior through provision of technical support for the development of a confidential and comprehensive complaint mechanism for survivors of sexual violence. The draft concept was submitted for the Minister's approval.

Indicators of progress	*Metrics*
	• The interministerial mechanism of the Women's Protection Centres Coordination Committee, supported by the United Nations Trust Fund in Support of Actions to Eliminate Violence against Women, obtained a waiver from the President's Office for the issuance of national identity cards and passports for clients of Women's Protection Centres and their children. The provision of such documentation is subject to the consent of male family members, which is often not procurable by those clients. The waiver not only has immediate benefits for the survivors of violence against women but also sets a groundbreaking precedent in legal procedures, which may be the basis for transformative changes as regards the existing restrictions to movement without a male's consent and a chaperone.
	• With the support of UNAMA, the Government published its third consecutive report on the status of implementation of the law on the elimination of violence against women. That report reiterates the findings of previous reports and provides an update on actions taken by the Government, such as the expansion of prosecution units for the elimination of violence against women (to 20 provinces so far), awareness-raising with religious leaders and the development of a proposal for a pilot specialized court for the elimination of violence against women in Herat.
	• In April and June, the Government appointed women to 4 ministerial positions out of a total of 25; and appointed two women as provincial Governors, one of whom was later appointed Deputy Governor of Kabul Province. The proposed female candidate nominated to the Supreme Court did not win a sufficient number of votes in the Parliament.
	• The Government issued a regulation on the prohibition of harassment in public life in September 2015, which also provides protection from sexual harassment, constricting women's participation in public life. This also constitutes a commitment made by the Government of Afghanistan under the Self-reliance through Mutual Accountability Framework.
	• As of 2015, there are 23 operational Women's Protection Centres, of which 11 are supported by UN-Women, in the provinces of Baghlan, Bamyan, Daikundi, Jawzjan, Kabul, Kandahar, Kunar, Laghman, Nangarhar, Parwan, Samangan and Takhar. Through these 11 Women's Protection Centres and five Family Guidance Centres, more than 3,500 survivors of violence have received protection, health care, legal aid, mediation and other lifesaving services.

Indicators of progress	*Metrics*
	• In October 2015, the online database of the National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan was endorsed by the Ministry of Women's Affairs as a result of United Nations advocacy. As one of the commitments of the Government of Afghanistan under the Self-reliance through Mutual Accountability Framework, the database enables open access to data on the number of cases of violence against women, tracking, and follow-up of those cases.
Improved awareness of, and support for, legal and policy measures related to combating impunity and furthering transitional justice	• In 2015, UNAMA continued to support the third phase of the Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace initiative. A national Afghan People's Dialogue conference, which provided a forum for civil society activists from all over Afghanistan who had been involved in the first two phases of the Dialogue, was held in Kabul on 15 January 2015. The forum enabled the activists to discuss key findings, recommendations and provincial road maps towards peace in the presence of government authorities. The Government was called upon to support four priority areas, including: – Promotion of responsive state institutions, human rights and rule of law, and tackling of the culture of impunity and widespread corruption; – Strengthening security institutions and disarming and disempowering illegal armed groups and other pro-government militias. • In 2015, 32 provincial civil society committees, with a total of 362 male members (74 per cent) and 127 female members (26 per cent), were established to advocate with authorities on the national road map for peace, the recommendations contained in the summary report on phase II of the Afghan People's Dialogue and the provincial road maps for peace. • In 2015, provincial advocacy committees held 278 advocacy meetings in 32 provinces which were aimed at encouraging provincial authorities, heads of law enforcement institutions, security officials and public service providers to institute reforms aimed at promoting respect for human rights and the rule of law. Thirty-four provincial road maps for peace were translated into Dari and Pashto for dissemination in early 2016.

Indicators of progress	*Metrics*
	• Afghanistan endorsed its National Action Plan on Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) in June 2015. Significant progress had been made in the development of an implementation plan by December 2015. The National Action Plan covers areas where significant advancement of women's rights could be achieved, including combating impunity by reinforcing formal accountability mechanisms and revising prosecutorial policies. If implemented properly, the Plan could become a tool with which to promote women's rights and access to justice.
Government fulfilment of reporting requirements on international human rights covenants and conventions and implementation of the recommendations emanating from the universal periodic review of Afghanistan under the auspices of the Human Rights Council	• The Ministry of Justice Human Rights Support Unit continued its coordination of the implementation of all universal periodic review recommendations provided to Afghanistan in 2014 as well as the recommendations of human rights treaty bodies. • The Human Rights Support Unit developed a detailed matrix for all recommendations received and broke them down into specific actions and progress or achievement indicators. Advocacy on specific issues, such as access to health care in detention, has already resulted in significant improvement of medical services at Pul-i-Charkhi prison. • From 7 to 11 March 2015, a five-day training session was offered by an expert from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to nine Human Rights Support Unit specialists, in cooperation with the UNDP project on Justice and Human Rights in Afghanistan. The training aimed at building the capacity of Unit staff to address gaps in its ability to implement recommendations emanating from the universal periodic review. • Starting in September 2015, the Human Rights Support Unit engaged in a process of reviewing and suggesting amendments to Afghan laws from the perspective of international human rights norms and standards. The instruments considered included the Labour Law, the Law on the Elimination of Violence against Women, the Juvenile Code and the Code of Criminal Procedure. Further, it engaged in reviewing indicators measuring implementation of universal periodic review and United Nations treaty body recommendations, in particular by the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of the Interior, the Attorney General's Office, the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, the National Security Directorate and the Ministry of Women's Affairs.

Indicators of progress	*Metrics*
	• In compliance with the concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women on the combined initial and second periodic report of Afghanistan at its fifty-fifth session in July 2013, a task force consisting of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Women's Affairs, the Ministries of Justice and Defence, the Supreme Court, the Independent Electoral Commission and the Attorney General's Office, with the support of UN-Women, drafted an interim report on the steps taken to implement recommendations 11 and 23. The report was submitted to the Ministry of Finance on 16 January 2016 for final review prior to final submission to the Committee.
	• At the time of the preparation of the present report, the second national report to be submitted to the Committee against Torture, due since 1996, was nearing completion by an interdepartmental committee. The Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission is expected to submit its own reports; and civil society is expected to submit its own parallel reports.
	• On 22 December 2015, the Ministry of the Interior inaugurated its fifth Child Protection Unit in Mazar-i-Sharif. This is the first Child Protection Unit to have been established since 2011; the first four were established in Afghanistan's western region.
Increased capacity and commitment of the Government of Afghanistan and the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission, as the Afghan national human rights institution, to respect, protect, fulfil and promote human rights	• An Advocacy Committee on *Bacha Bāzī*, led by the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission, jointly with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and UNAMA, drafted legislation in 2015 that prohibits and criminalizes *bacha bāzī*, a practice involving the sexual abuse of young boys. The Committee submitted the draft law to the Ministry of Justice for final review and endorsement by the Council of Ministers and the Parliament. The stand-alone draft was considered for possible inclusion in the broader revision of the Penal Code.
	• On 23 September, the President ordered the establishment of a committee composed of the Office of the Attorney General, the Ministry of the Interior and the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission to monitor and investigate allegations of child sexual abuse.

Indicators of progress	*Metrics*
	• UNAMA continued the sensitizing and training of the Afghan National Security Forces on the protection of children in armed conflict, particularly on the action plan for the prevention of underage recruitment and the obligations of the Government of Afghanistan with respect to the 15-point plan contained in the road map to compliance. Progress included endorsement in December 2015 of the national age assessment guidelines for the Afghan National Security Forces as part of the implementation of the law criminalizing underage recruitment and use.

V. Economic and social development

Benchmark: Government policies, supported by the international community, that promote sustainable economic growth and contribute to overall stability

Indicators of progress	*Metrics*
National priority programmes are designed and implemented with international support and endorsement	• In 2015, different ministries under the leadership of the President of Afghanistan prepared their 100-day plans for effective, responsive and accountable governance. Plans were launched through press conferences. This move raised the expectations of the public and of domestic and international stakeholders in respect of the Government's efforts to improve governance, accountability and transparency. • On 7 April, the President announced an initiative to establish a social contract between the Government and citizens of the country, in keeping with the reform agenda presented at the London Conference on Afghanistan. In the first meeting of the Cabinet, on 23 April, Mr. Ghani instructed ministers to formulate strategies for their first 100 days in office. On 26 May, at an extraordinary Cabinet meeting, Mr. Ghani announced the launch of those plans by the ministries, which was conducted in August 2015.

Indicators of progress	*Metrics*
	• The Government is also following up on planned reforms of development management structures. Six development councils (on human capital development; construction and infrastructure; finance and economic management; regional economic cooperation; governance and justice; and land and water management) were established by the Cabinet on 2 September to oversee the 12 national priority programmes. Four of these councils (the High Economic Council; the Human Capital Development and Employment Council; the Infrastructure and Construction Council; and the Regional Cooperation Council) have been convened.
	• Further to the draft concept note prepared by the Afghan Security Council, the Ministry of Justice and the Attorney General's Office prior to the 5 September 2015 Senior Officials Meeting, the Government established in November a Committee on the National Programme for Justice Reform, chaired by the Office of Administrative Affairs. The Committee was tasked to conduct an assessment of ministries.
	• The Government followed up on its London Conference commitment (under the "Realizing self-realization: commitments to reform and renewed partnership" agenda) to consolidating national priority programmes and reducing their number from 21 to 12. At the 5 September Senior Officials Meeting, the Government committed to the embedment of the concept notes of four national priority programmes (on the citizens' charter, urban development, rural development, and women's economic empowerment) in a development framework, to be reviewed by the Cabinet by the first half of 2016.
More equitable distribution of development assistance and government expenditure throughout Afghanistan	• The Provincial Budgeting Policy was approved by the Council of Ministers on 5 October. The policy encourages the deconcentration of the planning, formulation, execution and monitoring stages of the budget within the confines of a legal framework in accordance with the constitution and other applicable laws. The focus of this policy is to utilize the national budget to empower local governance so as to enable communities at the provincial level.
Increased revenue collection and sustainable growth based on Afghan resources	• In updated analyses released shortly before the 2015 Spring Meetings of the World Bank Group, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank revised 2014 growth estimates down to 1.3 per cent for 2014. On 5 January 2016, IMF informed donors that it currently estimates gross domestic product (GDP) growth in 2015 at 1.5 per cent, a drop from earlier projections of 3.5 percent (which were adjusted to 2 per cent in September 2015).

Indicators of progress	*Metrics*
	• In January 2016, the Government reported that customs revenues had increased by 17 per cent since December 2014 and registration of new taxpayers by 24.5 per cent. IMF informed donors in a briefing that domestic revenue collection in 2015 had been fairly strong, although targets were lowered when growth projections were adjusted and the authorities encountered delays in implementing new revenue measures. In particular, domestic revenue collection appears to have met the current target of 114 billion Afghan afghanis (approximately 1.6 billion United States dollars at current exchange rates), subject to final confirmation once the December financial reports are received and reviewed. This is attributable to reforms in both the Afghanistan Revenue Department and the Afghanistan Customs Department, new revenue measures and one-off receipts of tax arrears. • Public finance management reform is ongoing. Public Financial Management Road Map II was launched in December 2015 and directorates are in the process of submitting five-year roll-out plans.

VI. Regional cooperation

Benchmark: sustained and effective regional coordination in support of prosperity, peace and stability

Indicators of progress	*Metrics*
Improved coordination of regional bodies and increased regional investments	• On 14 January 2015, Mr. Ghani visited the United Arab Emirates. An "Enduring strategic partnership agreement" on security, civil protection and counter-terrorism was signed. On 21 and 22 January, Mr. Ghani visited Turkmenistan, where he discussed regional energy and transport connectivity. Documents signed included a Memorandum of Understanding on the Further Development of Cooperation in the Area of Electric Power. On 19 and 20 April, Mr. Ghani visited the Islamic Republic of Iran. The two countries agreed on engagement in intelligence and security cooperation in countering terrorism and drug trafficking. An agreement was reached on measures to register all Afghans in the Islamic Republic of Iran. From 27 to 29 April, Mr. Ghani visited India. Five agreements were signed. On 20 November, Mr. Ghani visited Kazakhstan, where he discussed bilateral trade, regional security and counter-terrorism cooperation. Afghanistan and Kazakhstan signed two agreements and three Memorandums of Understanding. On 22 December, Mr. Ghani visited Azerbaijan. The parties highlighted the potential for increased cooperation, including a transit route from China through Afghanistan to Azerbaijan, and signed a Memorandum of Understanding and an agreement. On 23 and 24 December, Mr. Ghani visited Turkey. The President of Turkey pledged continued military, political, economic, commercial and cultural cooperation with Afghanistan. Three documents were signed. • On 26 September, Afghanistan, China and the United States of America co-chaired a high-level event on Afghanistan on the margins of the session of the General Assembly in New York. The Chief Executive of Afghanistan, Abdullah Abdullah, highlighted the country's "twin strategy" of pursuing peace and taking advantage of the region's economic potential. • On 30 November, Mr. Ghani and the Prime Minister of Pakistan, Nawaz Sharif, meeting on the margins of the twenty-first session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (the Climate Change Conference), held in Paris, discussed the Afghan peace process. Pakistan committed to work with Afghanistan and those who wished to reconcile, and act against those who reject peace.

Indicators of progress	*Metrics*
	• On 27 December, the Chief of Army Staff of Pakistan, Raheel Sharif, visited Afghanistan. The parties agreed to work towards the peace talks between the Government of Afghanistan and the Taliban within an Afghanistan-Pakistan-China-United States quadrilateral framework.
	• Under the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process, co-chaired by Afghanistan, participating countries met to advance confidence-building measures. On 27 February, a meeting of the Regional Technical Group on Regional Infrastructure Confidence-building Measures of the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process was held in Ashgabat. On 11 March, a meeting of the Regional Technical Group on Counter-terrorism Confidence-building Measures of the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process was held in Ankara. On 29 April, a meeting of the Regional Technical Group on Counter-narcotics Confidence-building Measures of the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process, held in Baku, agreed on 12 priority regional counter-narcotics activities for 2015. On 8 September, at a meeting of the Regional Technical Group on Disaster Management Confidence-building Measures of the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process, held in Islamabad, agreement was achieved on the road map for confidence-building measures. Two meetings of the Regional Technical Group on Trade, Commerce and Investment Opportunities Confidence-building Measures were held in Delhi, India, on 1 October and 19 November. On 23 November, a meeting of the Regional Technical Group on Education Confidence-building Measures was held in Tehran.
	• On 27 September, a Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process Senior Officials Meeting was held on the margins of the meeting of the General Assembly in New York. On 8 December, a Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process Senior Officials Meeting was held in Islamabad.
	• On 9 December, the fifth Heart of Asia Ministerial Conference was held in Islamabad. Mr. Ghani inaugurated the Conference jointly with the Prime Minister of Pakistan. The 2015 Islamabad Declaration calls upon the Afghan Taliban and other armed opposition groups to join in peace talks with the Government of Afghanistan, and stresses the need for a collaborative regional security and counter-terrorism approach. On the margins of the Conference, Mr. Ghani and Mr. Sharif met bilaterally, and held trilateral and quadrilateral meetings with the United States and China, where the parties agreed to work together towards enabling resumption of the peace talks.

Indicators of progress	*Metrics*
	• On 11 March, the twenty-fifth meeting of the Tripartite Commission for the Voluntary Repatriation of Afghan Refugees from Pakistan was held in Islamabad, with the participation of the representatives of Afghanistan, Pakistan and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The parties agreed to support the voluntary repatriation and reintegration of refugees, taking into account Afghanistan's absorption capacity. Pakistan agreed to register all undocumented Afghan refugees. A six-member bilateral committee was established.
	• On 9 and 10 April, the working group on the drafting of the Pakistan-Afghanistan-Tajikistan trilateral transit and trade agreement finalized discussions on the draft agreement in Dushanbe. The parties also discussed prospects for a preferential trade agreement, joint business councils, and cross-border logistical and administrative cooperation. On 24 April, Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan and Tajikistan signed the last documents pending for implementation of the Central Asia-South Asia Electricity Transmission and Trade Project. On 9 May, Afghanistan and Uzbekistan signed a protocol agreement on bilateral cooperation in the fields of commerce, power engineering, and transport and transit. On 12 and 13 December, Mr. Ghani attended the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India Pipeline project ground-breaking ceremony in Turkmenistan, together with the President of Turkmenistan, the Prime Minister of Pakistan and the Vice-President of India.
	• On 27 August, the President of Turkmenistan visited Kabul. Afghanistan and Turkmenistan signed two agreements, three Memorandums of Understanding, and a joint statement. Turkmenistan agreed to a fivefold increase in electricity deliveries to Afghanistan.
	• On 3 November, the Vice-President of China visited Afghanistan. Afghanistan and China signed three agreements. In the context of China's increased investment in regional connectivity, and particularly of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor announced in May, the Vice-President expressed a willingness to support infrastructure connecting Afghanistan with its neighbours.
	• On 4 September, the Sixth Regional Economic Cooperation Conference for Afghanistan was held in Kabul. In his speech, Mr. Ghani reiterated Afghanistan's goal of becoming a "roundabout" of ideas, people and goods.

Indicators of progress	*Metrics*
	• On 17 December, the World Trade Organization approved Afghanistan's membership in the Organization. • On 25 December, the Prime Minister of India visited Afghanistan. India and Afghanistan stressed the importance of regional connectivity and prospects for trilateral cooperation with the Islamic Republic of Iran. • On 23 November, the tenth meeting of the Pakistan-Afghanistan Joint Economic Commission was held in Islamabad. • On 19 May, in Kabul, Afghanistan and the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization signed a protocol of cooperation. On 9 and 10 July, Mr. Ghani participated in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Heads of State Council Meeting in the Russian Federation, where he called for a single regional strategy to address terrorism and drug trafficking. On 14 and 15 December, Mr. Abdullah attended a Shanghai Cooperation Organization Heads of Government Council Meeting in China, at which means of encouraging regional economic growth and cooperation, including with Afghanistan and other observer States, were discussed. Afghanistan applied for full membership in the Organization.

VII. Partnership between the Government of Afghanistan and the international community

Benchmark: coherent support by the international community for Afghan priorities within an Afghan-led coordination framework

Indicators of progress	*Metrics*
Increased proportion of aid aligned with the Afghanistan National Development Strategy and government priorities	• The Government reviewed three years of annual Development Cooperation Dialogues in order to finalize its 2012-2014 development cooperation report. The report's highlights include identification of the challenges in respect of the definition of alignment, with reference to differences in estimates of alignment percentages between donors and the Government, and the ongoing national priority programmes consolidation process. Plans were made for the 2016 Development Cooperation Dialogues, which were expected to take up the topic of the definition of alignment, in keeping with the recommendation of the 2012-2014 development cooperation report. The Government is currently undertaking efforts to develop a refreshed National Development Strategy, which could have an impact on alignment assessments once it is completed and adopted.
Improved accountability of procurement and contracting on behalf of the Government and the international community	• The National Procurement Commission, foreseen under "Realising self-reliance" was established in March 2015. An update on progress in meeting Self-reliance through Mutual Accountability Framework (SMAF) deliverables, circulated on 18 January 2016, confirms that the Commission adopted nine service standards according to the amended Procurement Law of 2015, in line with Framework deliverable 4: "The National Procurement Commission adopts and implements service standards according to the 2009 Procurement Law (as amended) by the second half of 2016."
	• The Government provided several updates on the achievements of the National Procurement Commission in 2015, quantifying efficiency gains. According to the latest update in January 2016, an estimated US$ 132 million was saved thanks to procurement reforms, including the creation of the Commission. The Government also reported that it had recently approved 15 contracts for the Ministry of the Interior for a total of 1.216 billion afghanis (US$ 17.7 million) in one sitting, thereby saving an estimated 212 million afghanis (US$ 3 million). In November 2015, the Government reported that 32 companies had been debarred from February to November 2015, and another 22 were being considered for debarment, against 35 companies in the previous 42 months.

Indicators of progress	*Metrics*
Strengthening of the Joint Coordination Monitoring Board in support of the Kabul process and as a means of facilitating a regular review of progress on Afghan priorities and mutual commitments	• In 2015, the role of the Joint Coordination Monitoring Board was reaffirmed by the Government and donors on several occasions, including its role in consolidating consensus ahead of the 2016 Brussels ministerial-level development conference. The Government indicated its intention to convene two meetings of the Board in 2016 in preparation for the two 2016 international conferences on Afghanistan (the NATO Summit to be held in Warsaw in July and the Brussels ministerial-level development conference). • On 5 September, the Government and its international partners reaffirmed their development partnership and refreshed the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework, now the Self-reliance through Mutual Accountability Framework. Building upon areas of the Government reform agenda entitled "Realizing self-reliance", presented at the 2014 London Conference, the Framework includes an annex identifying 37 short-term deliverables by the end of 2016. These deliverables, and progress in reform in general, will inform the lead-up to the 2016 ministerial-level development conference in Brussels. • Throughout 2015, the aid coordination group of heads of donor agencies continued to meet regularly, alternating between donor-only meetings hosted by UNAMA and joint donor-government meetings hosted by the Ministry of Finance. The regular meetings, accompanied by working meetings of a subset of major donors, supported the ongoing review of development progress and government and donor mutual commitments. • The Civil Society Joint Working Group has represented Afghan civil society in high-level development meetings and conferences since the July 2012 Tokyo Conference on Afghanistan. Its role in monitoring progress on aid commitments was reaffirmed at the 5 September Senior Officials Meeting through the signing off on a "Mutual Cooperation Mechanism" with the Administrative Office of the President. The Civil Society Joint Working Group has since developed a monitoring tool to assess progress against commitments of the Self-reliance through Mutual Accountability Framework.

VIII. Counter-narcotics

Benchmark: sustained trend in the reduction of poppy cultivation, narcotics production and drug addiction

Indicators of progress	*Metrics*
Decrease in poppy cultivation, narcotics production and addiction rates	• Opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan decreased in 2015, with the total area under cultivation being estimated at 183,000 hectares, representing a 19 per cent decrease over the area of 224,000 hectares cultivated in 2014. Opium production in 2015 was estimated at 3,300 tons, representing a decrease of 48 per cent over the 6,400 tons produced in 2014. In 2015, opium prices increased in all regions of Afghanistan, possibly the result of a decrease in supply. However, at US$ 0.57 billion, or the equivalent of roughly 4 per cent of Afghanistan's estimated GDP, the farm-gate value of opium production had decreased by 33 per cent in 2015. This is the lowest level that has been observed since 2009 (not adjusted for inflation). The overall number of poppy-free provinces in Afghanistan remained almost the same, at 14, with only Balkh losing its poppy-free status in 2015. Ninety-seven per cent of total opium cultivation in Afghanistan occurred in the southern, eastern and western regions of the country, which include the country's most insecure provinces. The southern region accounted for 66 per cent of total cultivation, the western region for 24 per cent and the eastern region for 7 per cent, with cultivation concentrated in Kapisa, Kunar, Laghman and Nangarhar provinces. The remaining regions (northern, north-eastern and central) together accounted for 3 per cent of cultivation. • According to the Afghanistan National Drug Use Survey 2015, which combines urban and rural data, there are an estimated 2.9 million to 3.5 million male, female and child drug users in Afghanistan. The national level of adult drug users is estimated at between 1.9 million and 2.4 million, which represents 12.6 per cent of the adult population. This figure is more than double the global drug use rate of 5.6 per cent for the adult population. • In 2015, in response to the overwhelming drug addiction situation in the country, the Government of Afghanistan established 5 new drug treatment centres and upgraded 13, with technical support from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and other international organizations.

Indicators of progress	*Metrics*
	• In 2015, following the Transition Plan, 26 treatment centres were handed over to the Government by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and other international organizations. These centres have an annual treatment capacity of about 33,000. However, this allows only 8 per cent of the opium and heroin users in the country to access any form of drug treatment services.
Increase in effective interdiction and counter-trafficking efforts	• In 2015, Afghan law enforcement authorities conducted a total of 2,617 counter-narcotics operations which resulted in seizures of 5,271 kilograms of heroin, 30,180 kilograms of opium, 13 kilograms of morphine, 17 kilograms of methamphetamine, 162,817 kilograms of hashish, 1,699 kilograms of solid precursor chemicals and 3,869 litres of liquid precursor chemicals. In addition, counter-narcotics operations led to the dismantling of three heroin manufacturing laboratories and one methamphetamine laboratory. Other operations included the seizure of 626 vehicles, 417 weapons and 407 mobile telephones. During these counter-narcotics operations, 2,939 suspects were arrested. In the operations, 16 members of the Afghan National Security Forces were killed and 19 wounded.
	• The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime Regional Programme for Afghanistan and Neighbouring Countries provided comprehensive capacity-building and operational best-practice support and networking opportunities for criminal justice actors in the region for the tackling of the narcotics problem. In 2015, this included supporting the organization of the Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan ministerial review meeting held in Dushanbe in May. At this meeting, law enforcement and judicial officials from drug control agencies, ministries of foreign affairs, general prosecutor's offices and financial intelligence units discussed legal and enforcement cooperation in order to facilitate the formulation of strategies designed to support the planning and implementation of operations through to the prosecution of the suspects. Participants were of the opinion that it was necessary to bring law enforcement and judicial authorities together so as to boost the overall impact of counter-narcotics efforts in the region.

Indicators of progress	*Metrics*
Increase in licit agriculture and related private capital investment in areas previously used for poppy cultivation	• In addition to a 19 per cent decrease in opium poppy cultivation and a 48 per cent decrease in opium production, remarkable progress was noted in the production and productivity of licit crops. According to the Central Statistics Organization, during the year 2014/15, increases of 4.9 per cent, 5.06 per cent and 12 per cent were recorded in the production of cereals, vegetables and fresh fruits, respectively, whereas increases of 4 per cent and 10.1 per cent were reported in the exports of dried fruits and carpets, respectively, compared with the year 2013/14. Approximately 40,000 tons of pomegranates, worth over US$ 10 million, were exported to foreign countries from southern Kandahar province. • The Minister for Counter Narcotics attended the second International Conference on Alternative Development, with the facilitation of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, in preparation for the special session of the General Assembly on the world drug problem in 2016. Global policy makers, experts, development practitioners, and civil society representatives from 27 countries participated in the event, for the purpose of examining alternative development in the context of the global development agenda.